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A H A S U E R U S.

A POEM.

BY A VIRGINIAN.

Robt. Tyler



NEW-YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS, 82 CLIFF-STREET

1842.

Deposited in the a. S. Dist. Court Clerk's
office for the South. Dist. of N.Y. 20th Jan' 1842

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W. C. L. 1870. 1920.

P R E F A C E.

THE author of "Ahasuerus" lays no claim to originality in the conception of the subject of his poem. It is as old as the time of the Crucifixion, and is, he believes, to be found recorded in Scriptural history. It seemed, however, to present to his mind a good material out of which to construct a poem of some interest. How he has succeeded in his undertaking the public will decide. He hopes, however, that the inexperience of a first effort (of so public a character) will excuse many of its numerous imperfections. It is certainly in a state of mind vacillating between hope and fear that the author has determined, at the solicitation of some friends, to publish a poem that he flatters himself may not prove to be entirely unworthy perusal by his countrymen. If it be condemned, he has at least the consolation to know that it is not the first foolish book which has been issued from the press.

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A H A S U E R U S.

Now in the East the Star of Beth'lem rose
That saw Messiah's birth, and o'er the earth,
When eve with dews and summer twilight came,
From where the Orb of Promise sat on high,
A flood of pearly light stream'd softly down.
This was the sign the wise man spake of old,
When to his vision Time unveil'd was shown,
And by the power of prophecy he read,
While thunders shook the trembling universe,
The wondrous birth of Christ and man redeem'd.

Amid their snowy flocks on Chaldee plain,
The shepherds watch'd with astronomic gaze
That holy orb roll slowly up the sky ;
And when at last, full blazing in its sphere,
It paused upon its way, and glitter'd there,

A silver flame, that paled the Morning Star,
They knew the portent, and upraised their eyes
In thanks to great Jehovah ; then arose,
And, singing songs of gladness, went them forth,
And following straight the heaven-directing guide,
And drinking in its radiance as they gazed,
They came unto the place where Jesus lay,
The newborn God ! sweet Saviour of the world !
There by the manger rude Saint Mary sat,
Her dovelike eyes upon the baby cast
In holy pride ; and as the infant slept,
Beth'lem's bright star shone o'er his smiling face,
And by its light they hail'd the infant God !

* * * * *

LIST how those soft, persuasive accents steal
Through the hush'd heart of yon awe-stricken
throng :
And mark that brow in light celestial clad,
Where Meekness, Charity, and Love enthroned,
Sit in their circle with angelic grace.

There, as the evening's zephyr gently breathes
His freshest incense through those olive groves,
While every leaf makes music to the ear:
There, as the rich beams of the western sun
Shower gold and jewels o'er those verdant hills,
Till every rustling branch and mossy trunk
Reflect the glories of abounding wealth;
Till every yellow weed, that long hath lost
The little life that nature portions it
(Its shrivell'd finger pointing to the sky,
A witness still for Him who never dies),
Obtains in that effulgent ray a life
More lovely than the softest tints of spring;
As though some spirit, wandering through the skies,
Had shed a light from his o'ershadowing wings,
By pity moved, on its neglected form,
And lent to this unhappy thing of time
The splendour and the joy that angels own:
There, where the sacred city's distant sounds
Musically mingle with the song of birds,
Till the rapt ear, sooth'd by those pleasing notes,
Gives to the happy heart a dream of peace,
Where love may muse, love taught by God to man:

There, while the tow'ring Temple's golden dome,
Afar off shining in its glorious crown,
Excites deep thought, and wakes a holy awe:
There, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus spake
Unto Judea's congregated tribes ;
And as his tongue, with holy themes inspired,
Pour'd forth a solemn, fervid eloquence,
Teaching, as Moses taught, those truths sublime
Of one great God, and everlasting life,
A murmur rose that caught the ear of Heaven ;
A sound of prayer—a hymn whose burden sweet
Gave praise and triumph to the Son of Man.

No chains may bind, no steel can touch his heart,
No dungeons terrify, no scorn control :
Hisses, contempt, the dagger's sharpen'd edge,
The obscene jest, the bloody crown of thorns ;
The keenest poison of malignant minds :
These fear'd he not, but on his simple way
Walking, and clad in peasant's coarsest dress ;
No forms of power, no ceremonial shows,
Naught but the majesty of his calm brow

To mark him as the chosen one of God :
Dust on his shoes, the cord about his loins,
The Saviour moved, on his high mission bent,
To save a world; to win his Father's smile.
How blessed was that work, O Lamb of God !
Imagination shrinks in horror back,
And phrenesied visions rush before the mind,
Till Reason totters on her trembling throne,
Aghast at forms she dare not gaze upon :
To hear the summons of the last dread trump,
Destined to shake the universal realms ;
To feel God's anger curtaining the world
With awful clouds, while sinks the gasping soul ;
To see the stars inflamed with madd'ning fires,
Their poise now lost beneath such agony,
Drive raging through the hot and shrinking air,
Until at last Earth, seized with that great pain
Too horrid for the solid rocks to bear,
Bursts into flames ; while Hell terrific yawns
With gates wide ope, exulting in that hour
In its deep gulf to catch her whirling form.
Then Nature, dying, shrieks in her despair,
While glow the heavens with one eternal flame :

Distraction then had seized all human minds,
While Misery's dark pall on every brow
Reflects a gloom unutterably dark.
O guilty world! saved from this hideous doom;
O guilty man! O mercy-loving Christ!

Such was the office, such the mission pure
Of Him who died for man, by man reviled:
And like a happy stream that gently flows
With breezy current through some arid plain,
A comfort and a glory to those shores,
Where flowers of loveliest dyes may sweetly bloom,
And lave their pure brows in its cooling tide;
Where the tall tree in healthy grace may rise,
Fed by the gushing waters of the stream;
Where birds may build, and pass their happy lives,
And rear their young, and teach them how to fly
In the blue air that God has made for all;
And teach them how to sing at morn and eve,
When sunbeams kindle, or when twilight weeps,
Delicious thrice from their instinctive breasts,
The praise and glory of Eternal Power;

Yea, like the south wind, like the summer's sun,
Filling the land with song and odours sweet;
Like a white fleecy cloud in azure skies,
Whose innocence invites a smile from heaven,
Bright link of joy between this rosy earth
And happy spheres above, where angels live;
Like evening's twilight star, whose pearly orb
Seems fix'd in fields of never-fading bliss,
Whose melting light sinks through the enraptured
soul,
And fills the mind with visions from on high,
Where Love supreme reigns o'er eternal life:
Such to the man of faith the Saviour seem'd,
And where he walk'd the earth itself rejoiced.

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P A L E rose the morn o'er Calvary's fatal mount.
A sign of mourning seem'd to fill the sky,
Yet rather felt than seen; a gloom, a cloud,
An incubus of night, sat on men's souls.

Was it the dawn that, rising o'er the hills,
Look'd on those sodden mounts with sadden'd gaze ?
Was it the stream, whose gloomy waters lie,
Frowning 'neath light than darkness yet more dull ?
Was it the cloud that o'er the city hung,
Through which the sun's rays feebly found their way,
Gleaming around with an unusual glare,
While glows the Temple's dome with blood-red
fires ?

Was it the wind, whose swift wings rushing by
Strike forth funereal notes that freeze the soul,
While visions gather o'er the darken'd mind
Of greater horror than night's dreams may paint ?
Nor cloud, nor palish dawn, nor fiery dome,
Nor moaning winds, nor Fancy's visions dark,
Through that dense multitude of anxious forms
Which throng'd the city's ways, awoke such fears,
And wrapp'd each brow in livery of wo.
Lo ! bending 'neath the burden of the cross,
Through the dark crowd the patient Sufferer comes,
The cruel thorns upon his gory brow,
The foam of thirst upon his whiten'd lip,
Swaying from side to side, with straining nerves,

Beneath a weight that bows him to the dust.
O vengeful man ! shall Pity weep in vain,
And Mercy have no tongue to reach thy heart ?
Shall the soft gaze of that love-speaking eye,
Mild as the azure sky when shines the moon
Through the calm firmament on summer's eve—
Shall pity, mercy, and the bitter tear
That torture wrings from his o'erburden'd soul,
Not turn you from that speechless act of wo,
Which spreads o'er universe a veil of gloom ?
In vain may Justice speak, and solemn Fear,
With anguish'd voice and supplicating look ;
In vain God's frown is seen in earth and heaven ;
In vain are prayers' and tears' appealing power :
No ears has Passion for Prayer's burning words,
No eyes to see the tears that Mercy sheds :
They seize him, bind him, nail him to the cross.
Forth from his hands life's ebbing torrent flows ;
His quivering feet are agonized with pain ;
The dews of death start on his clammy brow ;
And mid the shouts of that mad multitude,
While hisses, sneers, and fiendish jests and cries
Appall'd the very air, that caught the sounds :

The Son of Man drinks full his cup of wo.
Behold that Jew in sacerdotal robes:
Dark curses dye his livid lips with rage.
How bold his daring eye! His granite front
Looks like a mount o'er which a storm-cloud lowers.
His brawny arms might lift the city's gates:
His firm, full lips speak of audacious thoughts;
Audacious thoughts that own'd no moral sense,
That sought the eternal secrets of the world,
And finding naught but dust and ashes there
(For fruit nor flower the eye of sin can see),
He in his heart the chain that bound him cursed,
Cursed in his heart his impotence of will,
Cursed in his heart the virtues of his race,
Cursed in his heart the God who gave him life,
Cursed in his heart the very life he own'd,
And mid the poisons of his venom soul
Nursed thoughts of hate and malice to mankind.
And if, perchance, the spirit of pure love
Touch'd with her fairy wing his blasted soul;
If through his mind once coursed a gentle thought,
Imparting joy to those dark chambers there;
If light, and all the beauties of this world,

Sometimes did win a mildness to his eyes,
He trebly cursed himself with fiendish sneer,
And loathed the world that dared to yield him joy.
His mien, his port, proud Satan's halls might grace ;
E'en Beelzebub, in wonder lost, had gazed ;
Erect his form, clinch'd was his sinewy hand,
In which he held a dagger red with blood :
Red, too, his hand with sacrificial life.
Rapine, and blood, and lust, and courage high,
That would have warr'd with God's own thunder-
bolt,
Gleam'd in the channels of his iron face.
When others felt remorse, he felt delight ;
When others felt despair, he gladness felt ;
When others fear'd to go, with bounding step
And savage cry, like some ferocious beast
Made mad by thirst, who snuffs the cooling spring
That moists the gale amid hot desert sands,
He rushes headlong on his vengeful way,
Nor pauses then, though thousands are his foe.
And now, when Christ turn'd to the crowd his face,
His bleeding face, where pallid Death had traced
That awful seal which marks our mortal clay

While Dissolution cuts the thread of life ;
When they beheld that agony itself
Call'd forth no curse or murmur from his lips,
An awe crept o'er the restless multitude,
The tumult still'd, and Fear and Pity then
Touch'd their stern hearts with a relenting sigh,
And many whisper'd, "This is surely God!"
Not so the Jew : on to the mount he came,
On to the cross, with flashing, glowing eye ;
Revenge lay like a serpent on his lip,
And Hate was writhing on his cruel brow ;
And on his forehead bold a frown lay coil'd,
Dark as the malice of his cruel heart.
Smiling in scorn, he raised on high his hand,
And smote the fainting Saviour's ashy cheek,
Then spat upon him with a fiendish ire.
A flush of agony pass'd o'er Christ's face,
And they who nearest stood heard these low words,
"Ahasuerus, tarry till I come."

What sudden horror seizes on the crowd :
Shrieking they fly, for earth itself dissolves ;

The roaring earthquake rushes through the land ;
The hissing breaths of tempests scald the earth ;
Trees, rocks, and hills, and mountains groan with
 pain ;

The floods of ocean seem to fill the sky.

The eagle idly flaps his heavy wings,
Borne headlong down the thick and murky blast :
Dash'd from his eyrie-rock, the monarch dies.

The lion, panting, seeks the thicket shade,
Where track of man hath never press'd the soil,
In former time his safe and silent lair ;
But seeks in vain to battle with the storm :
In vain he tears the earth with glist'ning fangs,
In vain he struggles with portentous strength,
In vain with glaring eyeballs seeks his foe :
The earthquake demon opes his horrent jaws,
And grinds to dust the lion's fearless heart.

Men stand aghast, and women's prayerless tongues
Cleave to their throats like cold and clotted blood.
Some sank with fright, and sank to rise no more,
And many died beneath the tempest's shock ;
But when at last, amid encircling fires,
And with loud crash, as if some mountain, torn

From its deep base, were hurl'd against the sky,
The Temple's mighty dome in twain was rent,
Livid despair shrunk up their withering hearts ;
Each smote his fellow with a maniac hand,
Or, baring to the steel their raging breasts,
Quench'd fear and madness both in their own blood.

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AGAIN Jerusalem was clad in light,
And peace dwelt there in that sad, wondrous land.
Without a cloud the amethystine sky
Look'd smiling down upon the fragrant earth.
Through palm and olive groves the gentle gales
Play'd on their wind-harps wild, unmeasured strains,
While Luna's love-tuned bird with folded wing
Sang to the stars, and all those starry skies
Seem'd full of light, and joy, and God's pure love.
How calm the scene, how bright and beautiful !

How the soft music of the sighing winds
Mingles its notes with the gay, tinkling streams,
While through sweet heaven itself the star-bird's
tongue

Pours forth his thrilling, solemn minstrelsy.

Oh ! why will man seek Passion's burning throne,
Which, when attain'd, consumes him with its fires ?

Why let Ambition urge him e'er to climb
Up Fortune's slippery heights, to die at last
Amid those peaks, like a poor frozen worm ?

Why let the morbid cravings of his heart
Induce disease, which dries that fountain up,
Or turns those living waters of delight
Into a stagnant pool that drowns the soul ?

Is not this earth a paradise to him
Who lives contented with that glorious lot
That gives to man the birthright of a God,
If he will use his fine perceptions well,
His faculties, affections, and those powers
That stamp divinity upon his form ?

Yea, all this happy heritage of light,
These fragrant vales, yon purple hills, those streams
That wind their volumed way through vine-clad
banks

To spirit-strains of low, melodious song :
The opening buds of spring, the summer's flowers,
Pale autumn's mellow fruits—eve, night, and morn,
The glittering, liquid stars, the crescent moon,
The dew that sparkles on the velvet grass,
Refreshing showers that ripe the golden grain
And fill the air with perfumes fresh from Heaven :
All that we see in ocean, earth, or air,
Our being, life, our upright form, and step
That proudly spurns the dust the serpent breathes ;
The eye, that views the beauties of the earth,
Then wanders up to Heaven, and gazes there
Till moon, and suns, and stars, and angels bright
Become our fellows in the realms of thought,
And mortal taint is lost, and we are gods ;
The cheek, whose flood or ebbing tide proclaims
The proud heart's triumph or its crushing woes ;
The brow, the ivory throne of thought, whose light,
More dazzling than the day, strikes Falsehood blind,
Whose frown is blacker than night's starless void :
These are our birthright and our empire wide,
O'er which we wave our sceptre as a king.
Nor is this all : but mind, and heart, and soul

Make a new world still richer than the last.
Memory, whose prism glass reflects the hues
Of thoughts, that, born in joy, in sunshine live,
And take the radiant colours of the bow.
Hope, that soars on orient wings, and mounts,
That ever mounts through happy, happy skies,
And in celestial splendours bathes her form ;
Fair Hope, that breathes the amber air of love,
That feeds upon the honey-dews of life,
And dwells forever in the eternal land,
Where happy souls shall throng in angel bands,
When Death releases them from mortal chains.
Friendship, whose sympathy, more strong than steel,
Shall stand the force of virtue's sacred test,
Nor ever break or bend, but shall survive
The green-turf'd hillock and the marble tomb.
Love, too, whose tie so pure, so hallow'd seems,
That even the eyes of seraphs cannot see
One spot of rust upon that brilliant chain,
Whose subtle links entwine our willing hearts ;
Love for the partner of our joys and ills,
That from the happy altar to the grave
In bright perspective views a smiling land,

Through which we roam in life, and blissful pass,
After life's day, to worlds of peace beyond;
Love for our child, whose infant voice to us
Is sweeter than the cooings of the dove;
Yes, sweeter than the richest strains of song
That bird, or lute, or murmuring stream e'er made,
Whose soft blue eyes outlaugh the frolic morn,
Whose glance of light is rapture to our breasts;
Love for our gray-hair'd sire, whose holy brow
Reflects the light of wisdom and of years;
Love, too, for her who o'er our baby sleep
Hath kept her vigils through the wakeful night,
Nor tired till morn, but when the dawn hath stream'd
Upon the golden shadows of the East,
And Nature wakes from her soft dreams of night,
Hath snatch'd us to her heart, still dearer then,
For all the weary watchings of that hour,
Hath mark'd our infant sports with beaming eyes,
And grateful to her God, then weeps with joy;
Love for this aged mother of our heart;
Love for the word she speaks, her whiten'd locks;
Love for the ground she presses with her foot;
Love sacred, deep, love without depth or bound,

Love next to Him who gave us life itself,
For her who leads our erring steps along
From boyhood's feeble hour through virtue's path,
To the proud goal of manhood's dawning age.
Sure God's bright smile is on this sunny earth,
And all his gifts and mercies shower'd on man;
For all may drink of pleasure's fragrant cup,
Who walk apart in an unblemish'd life,
From Fashion's follies or the rage of vice.

But love to each is justice unto all ;
He lives in virtue who contented lives :
But he who walks about this happy earth
Frowning at all, and fill'd with hate to all,
Who walks on earth, but yet who lives not here,
Who darkens even the genial air around
With his black thoughts, while plotting others ill ;
Who laughs at pity, strikes at mercy's brow,
And scorns the tear that poor affliction weeps :
'Tis fit that he, the traitor to the Law,
A lurid beacon-light to warn, should be,
Should suffer for such sins a life of pain,

And die with God's dark frown upon his face :
Less he repent, and win a happier end,
Repent in tears with many a prayerful word,
Repent in spirit, weep his sins away,
Cleanse his foul heart with purifying thoughts,
And fearlessly sink into the arms of Death,
Fearless and faithful, confident in God.

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GONE now was Nature's glory from the world ;
Gone now her happy youth—her beauty gone !
No more sat Joy upon her verdant throne ;
No more Light's rosy smile was seen at morn,

Playing o'er dewy hill or sparkling stream;
No more shall sweet eve's cool, delicious shades
Sooth the bruised heart or calm the fever'd mind:
Time's hoary circles gather round the earth,
And Age hath palsied her majestic form.

All-hideous Death, th' insatiate ravager,
On his broad, heavy wings of gloom now lay
Motionless in air, dark-brooding o'er the scene,
And shrinking 'neath his pestilential breath,
Drain'd of their juices warm, all life quick fades.

Now sickly pale, and now eclipsed in gloom,
The huge, round, watery Sun look'd faintly down
Through the thick atmosphere, that, low'ring, lay
Stagnant and stirless, without wave or breath.
His feeble rays, robb'd of all grateful warmth,
Cold as the slimy worms that crawl in graves,
Uncherish'd fell upon the lap of Earth,
While vegetation wither'd at their touch,
And buds, and flowers, and fruits then blasted, die

'Neath that destructive, that envenom'd spell.
Thus shorn of light, unsteady in his sphere,
Terrific still, though in his aspect sad,
Gleam'd unreflected in the gloomy air,
That glorious orb which once fill'd heaven with joy.

The planetary spheres, that whilom sang
Their song of praise 'round God's eternal seat,
No longer moving in their golden paths,
Now quench'd and blotted out from heaven's great
chart,
Heady and blind, hither and thither fly,
Aimless and erring, through the with'ring skies.
Pale Terror, arm'd, stalks with colossal strides,
Flashing fierce lightnings from his baleful eyes,
And Day, affrighted, sinks in agony,
Leaving his rayless throne to pitchy Night,
Whose deep, dark shadows mournfully enshroud
With their dread pall the dying universe.
And then the gloom above unbroken lay,
Save by a meteor hissing on its track,
Or here and there a star that had not lost

All form and colour in the general wreck,
And Chaos reign'd supreme.

Earth unbalanced,
The music of her circling motion lost,
Through space unlimited wheel'd feebly on,
Moonless and sad, and wrinkled o'er with wo.
Old age, age desolate, unchanging age,
Nature in all her subtlest essence felt ;
And seas, and rocks, and mountains huge and strong,
The favourite offspring of that happy day,
When from the portals of Eternal Power
Time first came youthful forth on rushing wings,
With garland round his brow, and glowing eye,
And wooing, won her to his eager love,
Were all around her dying fast away.
Time rush'd no longer on his winged course,
But feebly went his slow, unmeasured round ;
Dim was his glance, uncertain now his step,
And bent that form in olden days so proud ;
Old age was stamp'd upon his hoary brow.
Wrapp'd in its sombre pall, the sky look'd old,

And moaning at life's universal wreck,
Now prostrate and appall'd had Nature sunk.

Gnarl'd, leafless, and barkless, on that last day
The forest-trees uprear'd their branchless heads
Amid the breathless winds, and naked stood,
Spectral and bleach'd, fast crumbling into dust;
And solitary in those vast, sad groves,
Sat tongueless Silence on her ebon throne,
O'ercanopied by black and stirless clouds,
While her hush'd reign makes darkness yet more still.
Jesu! how strange that not a sound was there;
Nor pace of crouching cat, nor tiger wild,
With stealthy spring and balls of living fire,
Nor lone owl's drowsy horn from hollow tree,
Nor ploughman's plaintive song on plodding way,
Seeking at sunset his sweet cottage home.
E'en Echo now, by Music taught of old,
Too beauteous to be seen by mortal eye,
Lurking within the shade of some old wood,
Or in the crystal grotto's sparry halls;
Or seeking oft the streamlet's gushing wave,

In some cool, pebbly cove, there shelter'd well
By Nature's veil of gray and timeworn rocks,
And waving copsewood green, from common sight,
Wherein to bathe her faultless limbs divine,
Echo had pined and died, list'ning in vain
To the fond call of him her faithful love,
Whose voice, though flying, much she worshipp'd
still.

No lay of bird, no insect's note was heard
In the bright sunbeams, singing happily.
Th' oppressive stillness burden'd Nature's ear,
Attuned to notes of perfect melody;
And the soft sweep of a small insect's wing,
Swift-flying there through air's deep solitudes,
Would, with a storm-cloud's thunder-trumpet's
sound,
Have smote upon the ear. Dark and extinguish'd
Were earth's hidden fires; and Earthquake's voice,
Forever hush'd, no more shall fright the world.
The dark volcanoes' furnaces were cold,
Once forced to glow and hiss with raging heats,
By howling tempest's mad imprison'd breaths;
Around them masses of black cinders lay,

Black cinders, sands, and stones commingled lay,
With the fused ores of metals, all corrupt.

The marks and scars of age all things did bear.
No tott'ring arch or cornice stain'd by time,
No broken pillar mouldering with slow rust,
Strewn on the barren ground, half buried lie,
To tell their tale of ancient glory now,
To speak of cities in their day of pride,
Where once the busy millions of man's race,
Mid purple, gold, and luxury's rich show,
Or rags, and wretchedness, and squalid want,
Had lived as kings, or died in deep despair.
The ruby's ray, the diamond's starlike light,
The virgin mine that glitters in the earth,
All bright and tempting things that buy men's souls,
And bind their senses in base Mammon's chains,
To man's keen eye and eager hand exposed,
Were grasp'd and held, and valued more than life:
And oft old Ocean to his crafty search
Had, from his palaces beneath the sea,
Paid tribute with his treasured miracles.

These were the monuments of his great fame,
Or to his pleasures gayest ministers,
And with untiring zeal he labour'd long
To make his art more perfect than God's law ;
And in the lofty strength of his proud mind
Had schemes devised of immortality !
But on him then the curse destructive fell,
And into ashes swept, together sank,
Worshipp'd and worshippers, forever gone,
Idol, idolators, temples, and proud priests.

The Mountains' peaks, unscaled through all past
time,
Down, ever and anon, loud-crashing fell
An avalanche of sound, and where they lay
Look'd like foul plague-spots on the fest'ring earth.
The torrents now, that foam'd from rock to rock,
Leaping towards the sea like racing steeds,
Their brawling courses long had ceased to run.
On cleft or precipice the tender flower,
Wall'd in from snow and winds by Nature's hand,
Like innocence that dwells mid scenes of strife,

No more shall grow unseen, and bloom in joy.
The scentless lichen, whose fierce-clinging roots
Plucks a vitality from barren rock,
Refused to cleave, and sorrow-drooping died.
Together crumbled rock and earth away ;
And in the place of Form, with graceful ease,
There haggard Terror sat with aspect rude.

Crestless and surgeless the untravell'd seas,
No longer moved by tide or lifting breeze,
Slept dark and stagnant on their unwash'd sands.
The thick and inky element stood still,
No more to sing in triumph to the gale,
No more to bear swift o'er its briny foam
The white-wing'd bird, the eagle of the sea ;
In the wide basin of the unfathom'd deep
Waveless and black the bitter waters rest.

The streams that flow'd perennial through the land,
Rivers which are the arteries of earth,
Whose constant pulses cool her fever'd form,

Toiling her way through her eternal round ;
Rivers which roll'd their tides in morning's light,
Shouting deep joy with a tumultuous song,
Or sleeping 'neath the moonbeam's gentle ray,
To the soft lullaby of evening's winds ;
Those pleasant waters are no more, are dead.
No more the breezes seek their sedgy banks ;
Dead are the sources of the rippling wave ;
And where the pearl and coral shell were strewn,
The ghastly bones of men and beasts corrode.

Of all existence, call'd by God to life,
When on that morning first, through chaos clouds,
The sun burst forth with his effulgent flood ;
When first array'd in all the pomp of youth,
The earth moved on, the wonder of the skies ;
Of all that in harmonious beauty dwelt
In air or sea on this terraqueous globe,
Not now remain'd the smallest, feeblest form,
To break the dream of Earth's unhappy sleep.
Ocean's innumerable throngs were gone ;
All kinds of beasts which knew the firmer land,

And the vast millions of the insect race,
That sportive pass'd their lives in evening's beam,
Or search'd amid the fragrant flowers of spring
For the sweet honey-drops, nectareous draughts,
Or sip of dew from cup of earliest rose.
Down to the eternal grave had man long since
In his uncounted generations sunk.
In vain he strove to gain immortal power,
And stamp the impress of a fadeless will
Upon the changing shadows of the world ;
In vain he sought with telescopic eye
To pierce through heaven to God's own viewless
throne,
On Science' mighty wings to soar on high,
And borrow glory from the rising sun ;
To circle Nature with expanded mind,
And steal from Destiny the seal of Fate.
Like the light sigh of some faint summer's breeze,
Like echo lost amid the distant hills,
Like autumn's dying leaf whirl'd into air,
Man pass'd away in his ephemeral race,
And he that made the universe his home
Was like the worm he trod beneath his foot.

O'er Life Death now had thrown his sable pall,
And all that could die, down into the tomb,
Leaving no sign, had long forever gone :
Yet one sad heart on earth still throbb'd with wo.
Unwilling witness of Life's hapless end,
Stern Matter's slow decay, and over Time
Eternity's dread triumph, THE LAST MAN
Now lived alone in all his quenchless pain.

On a huge rock that rear'd its hoary crest,
Close by the ebless margin of the sea,
Worn by his curse, and weary with old age,
Furrow'd with care, Ahasuerus stood.
Time had not spared the Jew, for heavily,
With feeble steps, he urged his painful way
Along the crumbling ascent of the mount ;
And when at last he sadly sat him down,
His weak frame shook as with his dying pangs,
And hideous pain convulsed his ghastly face ;
His head was bent upon his drooping breast,

And his thin, shrunken hands, together clasp'd,
Writhed with the fire that ate his quiv'ring heart;
And now and then low, moaning sounds escaped
His wither'd lips, yet none articulate.

His bitter cup of punishment was full.
No ray of sunshine on his forehead shone,
A gleam of joy to warm his fading soul;
No sympathizing voice fell on his ear
To break the waste of that dark solitude;
Not even a sound, save the harsh thunder-crash
Of mountains toppling from their heights above,
Stunning the stupid sense, broke silence there.
O! what a blessing would a word have been,
A single word, from lips however strange:
A human sound in that deep wilderness
More precious would have been than countless
 gems,
To the despairing wretch who craves for food,
And, hungry, perishes with want and cold.
One friendly tone, Affection's tender sigh,
In the dark madness of that last lone hour,

Would ecstasy have been as sweet as Heaven.
One beam of sunshine glancing through the air,
One note of some bright song-bird heard on high,
One draught of water from some silvery fount,
One throb of joy to feel he had a heart,
One memory of blessed by-gone hours,
One happy thought of rest, one hope of change,
The desolation of the world had made
A paradise for him. But drear his lot,
Drear, sad, and dark, in fear and in despair,
No voice, no sound to comfort his distress,
The past all gone, the future boundless wo;
One round of misery, one eternal thought,
Continuous pangs of ever-ceaseless pain !

From where he sat upon the crumbling mount,
He gazed around with a dull, sickly stare,
And mutter'd to himself like one who dreams;
But sudden, as he gazed, a fire seem'd stirr'd
Through his dull veins, and then a spirit came
Unto his thought, and from his stagnant mind
The clouds roll'd off, and he arose upright,

And walk'd with form erect, and gazed abroad
Upon that scene of desolation there,
Like one who wakes from an appalling sleep,
To fiercer horrors than his dreams had brought.
He press'd his hands upon his face, and tried
To waken Memory from her torpid sleep ;
And then the gathering furrows on his brow,
And the dilation of his fervid eye,
The quick contortions of his trembling lips,
The throbings of his heart, that shook his frame,
Gasping and writhing then in horrid pain,
The truth, the hideous truth flash'd in his mind.
He knew himself, he felt his hand grow red
With the unpiteous blow ; he saw Christ's dying
form

Struggling upon the cross in mortal throes,
He saw his holy brow stain'd with his blood,
He saw his dovelike eyes upturn'd to heaven,
He heard the shouts of that tumultuous throng :
What's he who strikes that dastard, cruel blow !
What words are those that pierce into his brain ?
“ Ahasuerus, tarry till I come ! ”
He feels them sink into his quivering heart ;

The ever-burning curse is on his soul,
A leper, Parian, outcast from his God ;
Friendship, and love, and sympathy denied,
A bed of torture, no repose, no rest !
He knew his punishment of darkest wo,
And felt it just, for deadly had he sinn'd.
Is there no hope, no mercy, no escape ?
A smile of light illumed his ghastly face :
There is a God of mercy yet on high !
He sank upon the earth, and up to heaven
Raised eagerly his bright, imploring eyes,
And through the skies he pour'd a burning prayer.
Beneath his step the soil no longer slid,
The mouldering, nodding rocks, torn from their beds
With lack of strength, no longer crashing fell,
And Nature ceased her wail ; while his clear voice,
Full, deep, and thrilling in that solitude,
Loud from amid the silence of Earth's grave,
Proclaim'd the justice of eternal God,
By suns and stars to be attested then,
And all the circling realms of distant heaven.
“ O thou, great God, who sitteth in the skies
Amid the lights of swift-revolving suns,

In brightness everlasting shining there !
Thou, mid exhaustless splendours high enthroned
Above the starry hosts in boundless powers ;
Thy birth unwitness'd by Eternity !
Thy end unmeasured in Futurity !
O ! God Omnipotent ! listen to my pray'r ;
Let my appealing voice reach to thy throne.
What pain, what fear, what wo, and what despair
Have seised my heart and pierced my suff'ring soul ;
My aching breast, my wearied brain, my heart,
Where throng a thousand woes, my sinking frame,
Most drear abode of age and misery,
In the strong passion of their agony
For mercy beg, with deep and loud acclaim.
What though yon sable clouds whirl o'er my head,
And wrap the earth in their dark, sulphury shroud ;
What though yon murky sun groans on his way,
Sad and terrific, through the gloomy sky ;
What though these mouldering hills and stagnant
seas
Emblem decay through all their lifeless forms ;
What are their woes to mine ? for they are dead.
They cannot feel those heartfelt flames that burn

And make my breast a rack where Torture lives.
They cannot feel the talons of Despair
Fix on the writhing soul that howls with pain.
They cannot feel the breath of hot Remorse
That fires and blasts the corrugated brow.
They have no load of damning sin to bear :
They cannot see that eye, that flush of pain,
That dying form upon the bloody cross ;
That blow—that blow—’tis madness in my brain :
O God ! extend thy mercy to my soul ;
Shut out these horrid visions from my mind ;
Within my heart thy anger burnest now
Like living lightning, and I pray for death.
Consume me with the thunders of thy wrath ;
Grind me to dust beneath thy trampling foot ;
Let mountains cover me, let lakes of fire
Cling with tormenting flames around my form ;
Give me but death and peace ; oh give me rest !
Ages on ages have I suffer’d pain,
Pangs ever-burning with their scorching fire ;
Over my wasting form, abject with shame,
Wave following wave, in cruel wrath uncheck’d,
Time’s hissing surges merciless have dash’d.

Upon the earth I am, all desolate ;
Heart-broken, desolate with grief and age ;
All things are dead, all things have I outlived ;
The passions of my soul are burning low.
Dread Fear, whose horrid forms once fill'd my
breast,
Whose shrieking voice was ever in my ear,
Chasing my footsteps wild, I know not now ;
And Pain scarce more with barbed shaft assails
My callous limbs. Man has been forgotten long,
And all the ties which bound me to my kind :
The strength of solid Earth has pass'd away,
And o'er bright Heaven a pall of gloom now
spreads ;
Sad Memory on its aliment hath fed
Its bitter food, until its light is out,
Save that which, like unto a furnace-fire,
It sheds consumingly upon one act,
One deed, one horrid crime of shame and sin.
Hope only now remains, hope in thee, God,
Hope in thy mercy infinitely strong.
The last man bows submissive to thy will,
And sheds, O Lord ! the penitential tear,

And calls aloud on thee for mercy now.
Glory to thee and to thy reign, O God !
And to thee too, Redeemer, Saviour, Christ,
Who mid bright bands of angels sit on high,
Of Cherubim and Seraphim, which sing
Continual songs of praises round the throne.”

When thus the fated spake, in fear, in faith,
In heartfelt penitence he bow’d his head,
And at his feet, upon the thirsty ground,
The sacred tear of sorrow gently fell ;
And softer then than human thought conceives,
Softer and clearer than the sweetest note
That spring’s light breeze or summer bird e’er sang,
Yet swelling like the thunder’s volumed tone,
Glided a voice into his listening ear ;
While universe through all her shining spheres
Ceased her loud music then, and trembling heard.
Hush ! ’tis the voice of the Almighty God !
Across the skies a dazzling radiance sweeps,
The clouds roll back, and earth is bathed in light ;
The sea leaps up unchain’d through all his depths,

And laves his shores with amaranthine waves ;
Down from their sources rush the volumed tides,
And rivers sparkle in the heavenly beams,
And lakes reflect the dimpling smiles of morn ;
The sod puts forth its turf, the tree its leaf,
And flowers spring up from the sweet, fragrant soil,
Enamelling the land ; and Spring's soft winds
Bear to the violet the rose's breath,
And clouds of perfume fill the amber air.
Hush ! 'tis the voice of the Almighty God !
A crown of mercy circles his calm brow,
And sad Ahasuerus sleeps at last.
Upward on wings of penitence, his soul
Hath sought the pure realms of eternal rest ;
And with the bow of glory set on high,
With flashing seas and smiling azure skies,
With purple mists and golden-banner'd clouds,
Millennium comes, and Earth, harmonious all,
Rolls slowly through her silver-beaming sphere,
And swells the music of the choral stars !



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